

# Abolition of Value is the only way to kill a State - Postliterate - Medium

By Postliterate

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(Part 3 of a polemic on value)

“Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.”

— Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, “First Premises of Materialist Method”

If the engagement of work is the first moment of humanity from which all else is ultimately derived, the *regulation* of work is the first moment of governance — in short, the embryonic form of statehood — from which all else is derived.

From this perspective, what appears to be a paradox in mainstream discourse, which is that the regulation of property can only occur as a private or as a state-owned institution, can be effectively escaped. Whilst it appears — the political zeitgeist still mentally in the wake of the deterioration of the Eastern Bloc — that the choice is either “free markets” or Stal-

inism, “private” ownership or state-owned tyranny, the fact that both constitute totalitarian relations should itself reveal that they are two sides of the same coin, and it is preferable that we go beyond this dichotomy.

The commonality between these two sides, i.e. their defining characteristic, is their necessity to reproduce the value-form. The value-form is what I mean by “regulation of work” — it is the most basic unit of estrangement and quantification of human acts for a purpose beyond their own engagement, and the most basic separation of human products for a purpose beyond their direct use. A “planned economy” does not have to be the Soviet *Gosplan* in order to possess a distinctive and encroaching need to regulate, in a similar way to so-called “free market” relations. The rational fear of bureaucracy, centralization, and political alienation, which is itself present in Marx at his most radically democratic moments, is a fear spurred by the prospect of a society which functions to keep the value-form alive.

Specifically, I am talking about the prospect of a socialist society (aka “lower-stage communism”) just as I am talking about the realities of our capitalist one. This socialist society would explicitly set out to regulate work just as the capitalist one does, merely more ethically. Labor would still be engaged in as an estranged activity, wages by labor-time still be calculated, and proper exchange of wages for products of equal value still all need be mediated. Whereas Marx set out in *Capital* to ask why value was the central measurement of capitalist society, his “lower-stage communism” would set out for the same calculations and again render value the central measurement.

“Indeed work itself — as organized by capitalism or socialism — has become the intersection of irrational social reproduction and amplified social constraints.”

— Felix Guattari & Antonio Negri, *Communists Like Us*

By “more ethically,” it should be clear that the wages of a socialist society cannot circulate, meaning that production is not directly employed for the purpose of accumulating these wages from others via exchange. However, it may still be guided by this principle, relying on sufficient labor-time being contributed by members of the socialist society in order to generate sufficient demand. From here, this society could either successfully overcome wages altogether and rely on direct democratic product distribution, or it could fall over backwards and reproduce market relations of supply and demand. Socialist wages, in this sense, carry with them nothing but uncertainty as to the preservation of the anti-capitalist mode of production; I view it preferable to never introduce them in the first place.

The history of hitherto existing society is the history of the value-form: slave-master and slave, lord and serf, bourgeois and proletariat, economic planners and workers — all sustained their classes on the extraction of value from the other. The slave contributes the quantified amount of labor-time necessary to pay for his subsistence and a profit to the slave-master; the serf sells his surplus to the baron, etc. Their monarchies, hierarchies, and vulgar states — all sustained on and emergent of the regulation of labor in some form or another.

The police, justice system, central bureaucracy, and the rest of the state’s appendages are thus not merely as they are in order to preserve capitalist private property, but more crucially, to preserve the value-form. Any major interruption to what the Krisis-Group calls the “treadmill” of a value-producing society (as it exists only as an end-in-itself), be it idleness, stealing, squatting, or even less aggressive acts such as distroism/mutual aid, must all be ceased — even the system’s apologists reveal the mass coercion their ideal requires when they ask how anyone would do anything but remain idle in a system beyond wage compensation. Only in periods of natural disasters, in which the value-producing economy itself is in crisis, can such behavior be tolerated; once the treadmill is up and running again, it expects all to return home to labor.

Once labor ceases to exist, that is, once human activity is longer cut between value and non-value producing, this whole mass system of coercion would essentially disappear. It is precisely because systems such as the Bolsheviks' which retained the same pro-labor ethic as capitalism, deciding a job was a right no matter the inefficiency, that forced it to retain its repressive arms. The "suppression of bourgeois elements in society" is, too, an extension of this same process of labor regulation, merely clashing with another form and battling out their coercive characteristics.

The only form of anarchy, the only freedom from statehood, and thus the only form of a self-guided society, can come from an end to the value-form. Whether or not the historical emergence of the state was the result of conquest and exploitative rule by neighboring nations, as Franz Oppenheimer claimed, or as the result of some voluntary social contract, is not of particular importance. The state would have, in either case, emerged from the excesses produced by the value-form; the state itself is merely one arm of this more fundamental system. The break from all forms of political repression (and politics itself) is, at bottom, entrance into a society of self-regulated human activity — in a word, of communism. Only such a system of total free and equal association between producers and consumers can be said to truly work for itself.